



# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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### **GENERIC AMENDMENT ADDRESSING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TORTUGAS MARINE RESERVES IN THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS OF THE GULF OF MEXICO AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT**

NOAA Fisheries published a Notice of Availability for the Generic Amendment Addressing the Establishment of the Tortugas Marine Reserves in the Fishery Management Plans of the Gulf of Mexico (Tortugas Amendment) in the *Federal Register* on March 7, 2001. Written comments must be received on or before May 7, 2001, and must be mailed to the Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, Florida 33702.

The Tortugas Amendment, developed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council), contains a proposed rule to establish two marine reserves in the vicinity of the Dry Tortugas, an area approximately 70 miles west of Key West, Florida. A collaborative process initiated by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) developed the boundaries for two inter-jurisdictional marine reserves known as Tortugas North and Tortugas South. The proposed rule would implement the Tortugas Amendment and establish the portion of Tortugas North that resides within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and Tortugas South, which resides entirely within the EEZ, in collaboration with efforts by the

FKNMS, the state of Florida, and the Dry Tortugas National Park. Tortugas North encompasses an area of 120 square nautical miles (nm<sup>2</sup>). The portion proposed to be established by the Council is 13 nm<sup>2</sup>. Tortugas South encompasses 60 nm<sup>2</sup>, which includes the Riley's Hump mutton snapper spawning aggregation site established by the Council in 1994. The Council proposes that fishing for any species, including highly migratory species, be prohibited within the marine reserves. Additionally, anchoring by fishing vessels would be prohibited within the marine reserves. The Council proposes that the marine reserves be established for a period of at least 10 years, during which the ecological benefits of the Tortugas reserves will be evaluated.

The prohibition on fishing and anchoring of fishing vessels will help minimize human disturbance in order to restore and maintain ecological integrity including a full assemblage of fishes, coral, and other benthic invertebrates and to create a reference area for studying human impacts on the ecosystem.

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